

YOU, THE STORYTELLER

Teacher Tips by Brent Amato

ONCE UPON A TIME . . .” From children to senior citizens, who hasn’t been delighted and taught by a well-told story? Yet many teachers never use this effective teaching method. You can communicate or reinforce a truth by a dramatic telling of a story.

Creativity and variety are not only the spice of life but also the spice of teaching. The average teacher never gets beyond lecture (the most used and often least effective teaching method). The law of diminishing returns applies to repetitive teaching methodology. Why not surprise your learners with a story? Jesus did!

Stories Stimulate

A story can ignite the imagination and captivate both the mind and the heart. While facts and principles need to be taught and mentally grasped, effective teaching grabs much more. Storytellers call the learners to get out of their chairs in a Sunday school room and journey with them through time and space into the lives of interesting characters with interesting issues. The adventures, characters, and truths from your stories will speak in powerful ways to your learners.

Stories Stick

After teaching a variety of learners at a variety of levels in a variety of settings, I am no longer surprised at what students do and don’t remember. Years, months, even weeks later, they will not recall my well-prepared presentation of principles, but they will remember a story I told that commu-

nicated something of value. Retention spans are precarious and almost always shorter than we teachers like to think. Here’s where stories really

shine. If you’ve ever read, say, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, you know firsthand the power of stories to stick.

“What stories could I tell?”

You can look to the perfect storyteller, Jesus Christ, and pick one of his stories. In fact, you will be doing just that when you get to the parables in lessons 8 and 9 of this quarter. The factual stories about Jesus are also ready-made for telling; an example is the birth narrative of Jesus in lesson 1. This story is so powerful that your learners probably already know it by heart!

You also can tell a story from your life. Pick one (serious or humorous) that relates to one of the aims for the lesson at hand, then watch your learners hang on every word. Not to be overlooked are the story illustrations that are part of the lessons in this commentary.

“But I’m not a storyteller!”

Sure you are! You’ve told stories to others all your life. But if storytelling doesn’t come easily to you, here are some tips:

1. Write out your story and read it to the learners, being careful not to be a “prisoner of the page.”
2. Rehearse your story with another person, preferably someone with some drama background.
3. Gauge the length of the story to your audience so you don’t “lose” them. I suggest no longer than a few minutes so that your story doesn’t turn into a less interesting, less instructive monologue.
4. Ask open-ended questions about the story to involve learners in the educational process. Let them “jump on stage” in the drama of the story and try out a role.

The power of a well-told story to teach a truth cannot be overestimated. Surprise your learners with a story they weren’t expecting. As you watch their minds and hearts light up, you’ll know you’re on your way to a great lesson!

